



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and
Information Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

EX PARTE OR LATE FILED

April 7, 1999

Ms. Magalie Roman Salas
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
The Portals
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Re: Letter on the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket
No. 96-45

Dear Ms. Salas:

Enclosed please find two copies of the Letter from Assistant Secretary Larry Irving, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, Department of Commerce, to Chairman Kennard in the above-captioned proceeding. A copy of this letter was also hand-delivered to each of the Commissioners and Lawrence E. Strickling, Chief of the Common Carrier Bureau.

Please direct any questions you may have regarding this filing to the undersigned. Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy D. Smith
Acting Chief Counsel

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable William E. Kennard
The Honorable Susan Ness
The Honorable Harold Furchtgott-Roth
The Honorable Michael Powell
The Honorable Gloria Tristani
Lawrence E. Strickling, Chief, Common Carrier Bureau

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The Assistant Secretary for Communications
and Information
Washington, D.C. 20230

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

The Honorable William E. Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Room 8-B115
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45

Dear Chairman Kennard,

On behalf of the Clinton Administration, I would like to commend the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) and the Schools & Libraries Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company on completing the first funding cycle of the E-rate program. As a result, some 25,785 schools, school districts, and libraries will receive \$1.66 billion to help pay for internal wiring and discounted connections to the Internet.

The E-rate program and other educational technology initiatives are transforming our nation's classrooms and libraries. Today, 51 percent of public school classrooms are connected to the Internet, up from 27 percent in 1997 and 3 percent in 1994.¹

As increasing numbers of children have access to the Internet from their schools and neighborhood libraries, we need to address the issue of how best to ensure that these children have positive, age-appropriate, educational online experiences.

With respect to the issue of children's access to online material that their parents and teachers deem to be inappropriate for them, the Administration has advocated a user-empowerment approach. We believe that empowering parents, teachers, and librarians with a wide range of tools with which they can protect children in their community in a manner consistent with their values is ultimately the most effective approach and one that is most compatible with the First Amendment.

The Administration cares deeply about keeping children safe while they engage in online learning and discovery. Many parents, teachers, and librarians share our concerns.

¹National Center for Education Statistics, "Internet Access in Public Schools and Classrooms: 1994-1998" (February 1999).

Hon. William E. Kennard

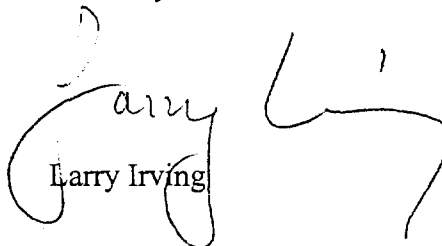
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Currently, schools and libraries are using a wide range of technology tools and monitoring techniques to ensure that children do not encounter inappropriate material and dangerous situations while online. These schools and libraries are determining what will work best in their particular school and community. Absent proof that local decision making is not working to protect our children, the Federal Government should not mandate a particular type of technology, such as filtering or blocking software. Rather, we should encourage "acceptable use" policies by all public institutions that offer access to online resources, including the Internet. An acceptable use policy should, while being sensitive to local needs and concerns, offer reasonable assurances to parents that safeguards will be in place in the school and library setting that permit users to be empowered to have educational experiences consistent with their values.

The Commission can help promote this policy by adopting a requirement that all schools and libraries that receive Federal E-rate funds certify that they will implement acceptable use policies before such funds are awarded to them. In the second cycle of funding, schools and libraries have filed nearly 36,500 initial applications for E-rate funds. Ensuring that these schools and libraries have acceptable use policies in place would be an important improvement in the program and provide a critical protection for our children.

Thank you for giving consideration to this proposal.

Sincerely,


Larry Irving

cc: Commissioner Susan Ness
Commissioner Harold Furchtgott-Roth
Commissioner Michael Powell
Commissioner Gloria Tristani
Lawrence E. Strickling, Chief, Common Carrier Bureau